ACCESS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

HIGHLIGHTS OF INFORMATION AND ISSUES FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF ACCESS COMMITTEES

Province of British Columbia
Ministry of Advanced Education and Job Training
Victoria, B.C.

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A Working Paper on Issues
for
the Access Committees

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FOREWORD

Over the next six months, a careful review of five important aspects of British Columbia's post-secondary education system is to be conducted. Eight committees - broadly representative of the eight development regions - and one provincial committee are being formed to study access, transfer, retention, completion, and transition to work.

Why is such a review being conducted at this time? It is because of a growing realization that, while there has been phenomenal growth and diversification in the post-secondary sector over the past thirty or forty years, and impressive advances in democratization of the system, there has been no slackening in the need for further development. Changing economic realities, changing demographics, and ever rising aspirations towards a just society all contribute to this need. To the extent that this need is met will depend, in large measure, the well-being of our province for years to come.

This Paper is intended for use by the Access Committees, the institutions and interested members of the public. It will present some basic information and pose a few questions. Readers are urged to question any assumptions they may perceive behind the questions or the data chosen, particularly to the work of their institutions or the work of the institutions in their area of the province. It should be noted that there are good reasons for some of the differences between institutions and provinces shown in the data which follow. Readers should be cautious about making judgements based on this limited data.

It is my hope that the Working Paper will help to focus our thoughts and guide our deliberations over the ensuing six months.

Les Bullen
Chairman
Access Study

DEFINITIONS

The following are rough and ready definitions. They are by no means exhaustive and should be understood as simple aids to comprehension at the basic level of this paper.

Access: refers to entry requirements to programs of study. These requirements may be academic, financial, geographic (e.g. nearness to a post-secondary institution), or technical (e.g. availability of distance education technology).

Transfer: refers to transfer with some credit from one post-secondary institution to another.

Retention: refers to the rate at which students are retained in a program. Its inverse is the drop-out rate.

Completion: refers to the percentage of students who complete a program of study and obtain a certificate, diploma or degree.

Transition: refers to the percentage of high school graduates who begin post-secondary education.

Transition to Work: refers to the percentage of students who obtain employment after their post-secondary education.

COLLEGE ABBREVIATIONS

Code:
- CP - Capilano (North Vancouver)
- VC - Vancouver Community College (Vancouver)
- SL - Selkirk (Castlegar)
- NC - College of New Caledonia (Prince George)
- OK - Okanagan (Kelowna)
- NI - North Island (Comox)
- CR - Cariboo (Kamloops)
- CM - Camosun (Victoria)
- ML - Malaspina (Nanaimo)
- KW - Kwantlen (Surrey)
- FV - Fraser Valley (Abbotsford)
- DG - Douglas (New Westminster)
- NW - Northwest Community College (Terrace)
- EK - East Kootenay (Cranbrook)
- NL - Northern Lights (Dawson Creek)

I. OPPORTUNITIES AND OPTIONS

1. Basic Education and Academic Upgrading

- 20 plus School District Adult Education Departments (mostly evening and part-time).
- School District Adult completion programs (full-time high schools).
- Adult Completion Correspondence - Ministry of Education.
- 15 public colleges (estimated 100 locations).
- Open Learning Institute distance education programs.

Questions:

(1) Is this diversity of delivery systems adequate to meet the need?

(2) Are these delivery systems fully utilized and equally effective in all parts of the province?

(3) What more can be done to maximize the usefulness of these systems?

(4) Are course offerings through these systems appropriate?

2. Vocational and Trades

- 400 Registered private training institutions. (Some offer more than just vocational programs.)
- About 10,000 apprenticeships in about 75 trades.
- 15 public colleges (full-time and part-time).
- 20 plus School District Adult Education Departments (mostly part-time).
- Open Learning Institute (OLI)
- British Columbia Institute of Technology
- Pacific Marine Training Institute
- Justice Institute

Questions:

(1) Is there a need for more vocational and trades training programs in certain parts of the province?

(2) Is there any unnecessary duplication in this area?

(3) Why are there so many private trade schools?

(4) Is there an appropriate balance between public and private post-secondary institutions?

3. Career Technical

- British Columbia Institute of Technology
- Emily Carr College of Art and Design
- 15 public colleges
- 2 private colleges and some of the 400 private training institutions
- Open Learning Institute
- 3 public universities
- 1 private university

Questions:

(1) Is this diversity of delivery systems adequate to meet the need for Career Technical training in British Columbia?

(2) Why are some programs heavily oversubscribed at some institutions and not so heavily subscribed in others?

4. University Programs

- 3 public universities
- 1 private university
- 15 public colleges
- 2 private colleges
- Open Learning Institute
- The Open University Consortium

Questions:

(1) Is this diversity of institutions adequate to meet the need for university programs?

(2) Are the services and courses provided by the Open Learning Institute and the Open University Consortium effective?

(3) What is the potential for further developing distance education?

(4) Should university transfer programs be extended in the college system or restricted to the larger colleges?

(5) Should larger colleges offer some four-year degree programs in conjunction with one or more universities?

(6) In comparison with the U.S., there are relatively few private post-secondary academic institutions, and these are all very small. Should non-public higher education institutions be encouraged or discouraged?

(7) Can a valid case be made for opening a fourth public university in the interior of British Columbia?

5. Programs for the Disabled

It is estimated that approximately 4,200 disabled adults attend colleges and institutes each year. Many enrol in regular college programs but some are accommodated in 70 special education programs.

In addition to basic personal, vocational and academic upgrading programs available at most colleges, there are special programs for the hearing impaired, the visually impaired, the emotionally disadvantaged, and the mentally handicapped at selected institutions. Several programs train disabled persons for employment in specific fields such as food services, landscaping and electronic assembly. Vancouver Community College offers 10 special programs and enrols about 1,600 students.

Questions:

(1) What more should be done to make post-secondary education accessible to disabled adults who can benefit from it?

(2) Is the need greatest for more special programs or for support services to assist students in regular programs?

(3) To what extent should special programs and services be centralized?

6. Programs for Native Indians

Universities offer special credit programs in Law, Native Indian Teacher Education, Band Management, and Teacher Aide as well as a host of individual courses and non-credit activities.

In the colleges, there are about 30 different credit programs ranging from skidoo repair to nursing. Eleven colleges participate with local Bands in Employment and Immigration Canada's Training Opportunities for Native Indian programs.

Questions:

(1) Which is the highest priority, special programs for Native Indians at the post-secondary level, or more effective intervention to assist Native Indians to complete high school?

(2) Is the need greater for more special programs or for support services to assist students in regular programs?

7. University Programs in Non-Metro Regions

By combining college, Open Learning Institute and university programs it is now possible for individuals in some of the large non-metro centres to complete the following university programs without relocating:

- teaching certificate
- university diploma/certificate in education, public administration, kinesiology, criminology
- B.A. in General Studies (S.F.U.)
- B.A. in Arts, General Studies, Administrative Studies (O.L.I.)
- Baccalaureate in Social Work, Nursing and Child Care (UVic)

Questions:

(1) Are students from remote regions seriously disadvantaged in obtaining access to these programs?

(2) What is the potential for developing and expanding such a coordinated system involving several institutions?

(3) How effective do students find this kind of approach?

(4) What can be done to further humanize and personalize this distance education?

8. Work/Training Opportunities

The Ministry of Advanced Education and Job Training coordinates programs that involve six Ministries and provide about 14,000 employment/training opportunities.

Questions:

(1) Are these programs effective in assisting adults to obtain employment in various regions of the province?

(2) Should more of these types of opportunities be developed?

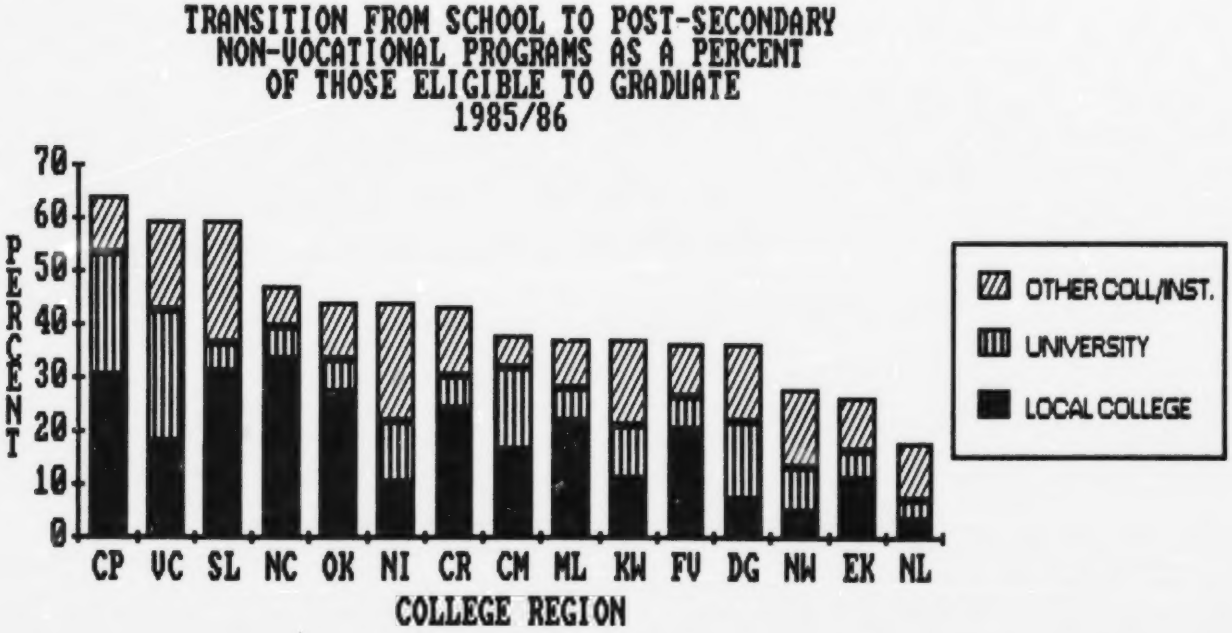
(3) Is the government giving enough support and encouragement to the private sector in developing work training opportunities?

II. TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Reports from Statistics Canada place British Columbia in the middle of the pack for the ten provinces for transition rates for 1985/86. About 45% of B.C. graduates begin post-secondary education the year following graduation. This rate has been growing slowly for some years. Alberta, with a transition rate of 63%, ranks highest in Canada; Saskatchewan at 33% is the worst.

Figure I shows 1985/86 B.C. transition rates by college region; rates vary considerably from one region to another.

FIGURE I



Questions:

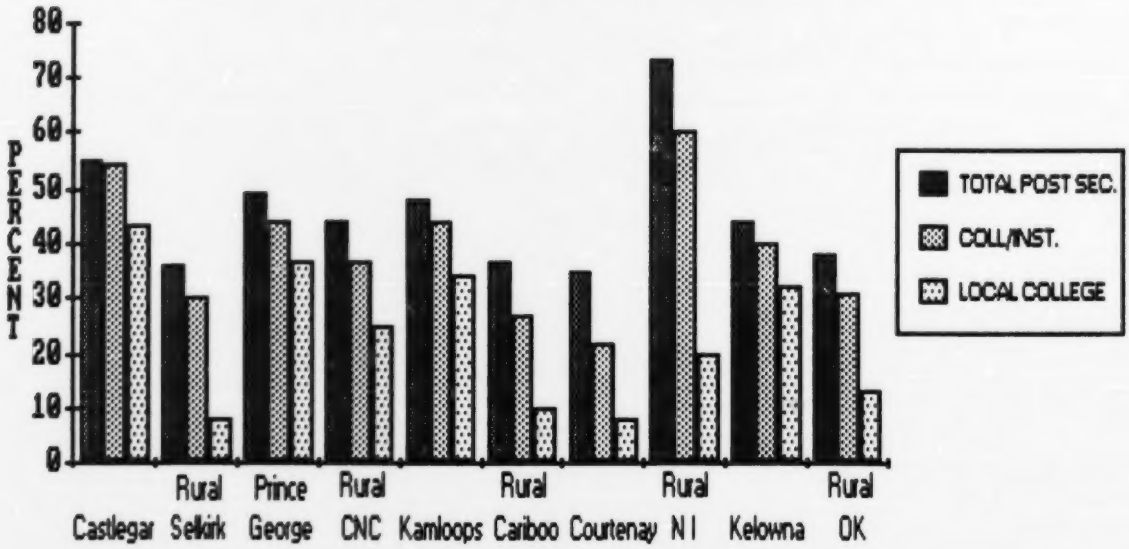
(1) Why does a non-metro college region (e.g. Selkirk) have a much higher transition rate than several metro college regions (e.g. Kwantlen, Douglas, Camosun)?

(2) Why do more students in some college regions (e.g. North Island, Northwest, Northern Lights) choose another college or institute than choose their own local college?

Transition rates also vary considerably from rural school districts in rural-urban regions to school districts that house a major urban centre, as shown in Figure II.

FIGURE II

TRANSITION RATES FOR RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS
IN RURAL-URBAN REGIONS COMPARED TO SCH. DISTRICTS
THAT HOUSE A MAJOR URBAN CENTRE 1985/86



Rural Selkirk is Grand Forks, Arrow Lakes & Kettle Valley
Rural C N C is all School District except Prince George
Rural North Island is Central Coast, Vancouver Island West, Vancouver Island North
Rural Okanagan is Keremeos, Princeton, Revelostoke & Southern Okanagan

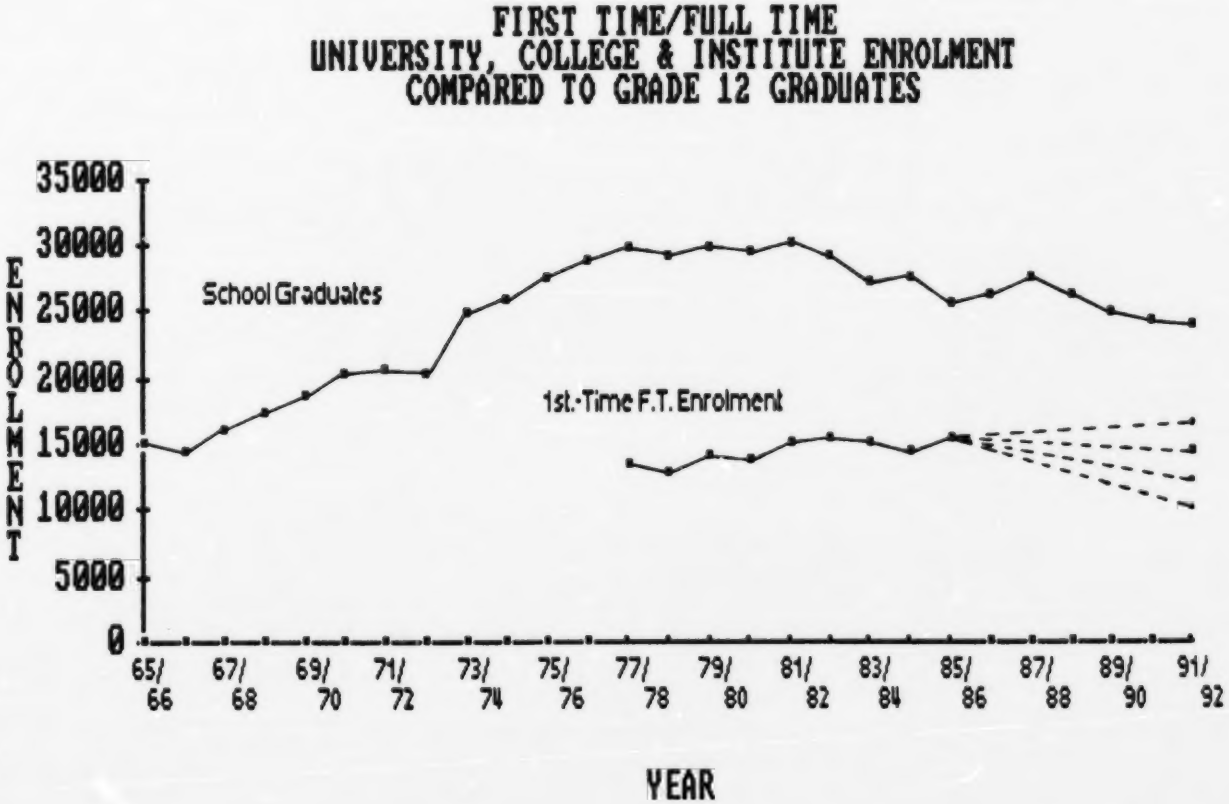
Questions:

(1) Why is the percentage of "rural" students who attend a local rural-urban college so much less than the percentage of "urban" students who attend such a college (e.g. rural Selkirk/Castlegar, rural Cariboo/ Kamloops)?

(2) What explains the very high transition rate for rural North Island College? (3) Why is the disparity between rural and urban transition rates so much less in the College of New Caledonia region?

The following graph shows that the number of Grade 12 graduates will be declining over the next few years. It also shows the first-time, full-time enrolment in post-secondary institutions up to 1985. The broken lines indicate four possibilities related to the transition rate. It is suggested that the rising and level broken lines will reflect reality only if deliberate steps are taken to further improve the present transition rate.

FIGURE III



Questions:

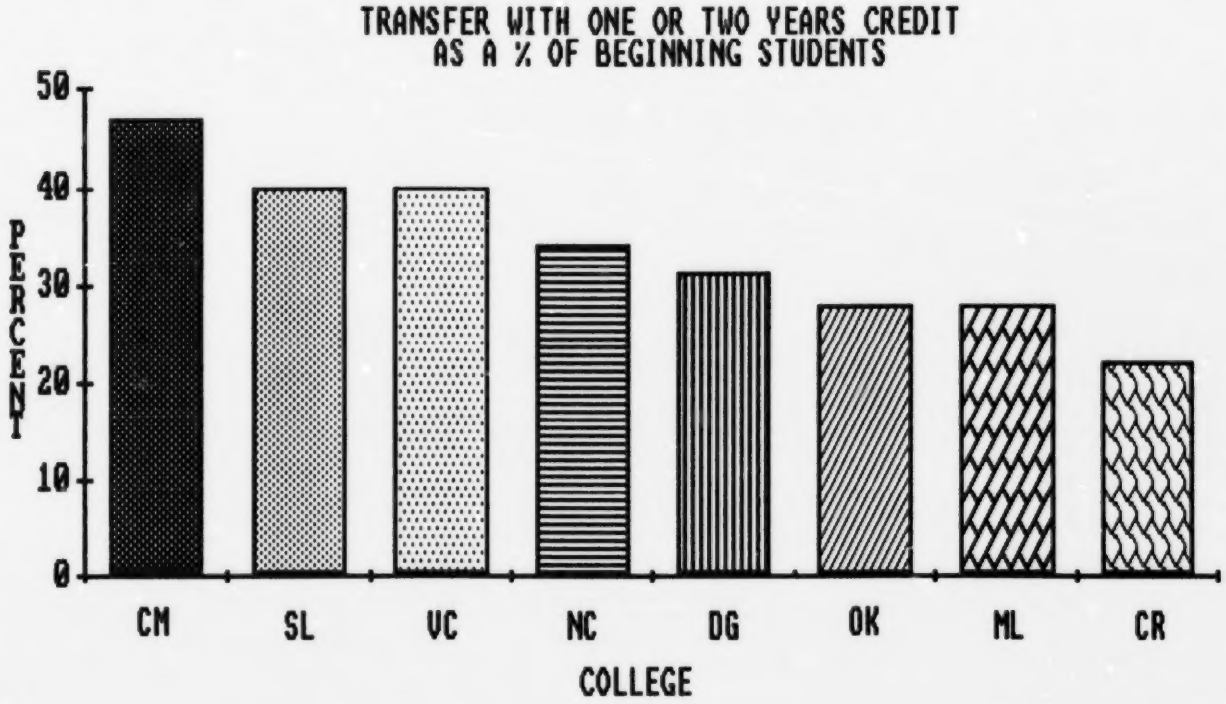
(1) What steps, applied provincially, would be advisable to increase the transition rate?

(2) What steps, applied locally to specific regions, would be advisable?

III. POST-SECONDARY PROGRAM TRANSFER/RETENTION AND COMPLETION

Many students begin a university program at a community college. They may transfer to a university after either one or two years of study.

FIGURE IV



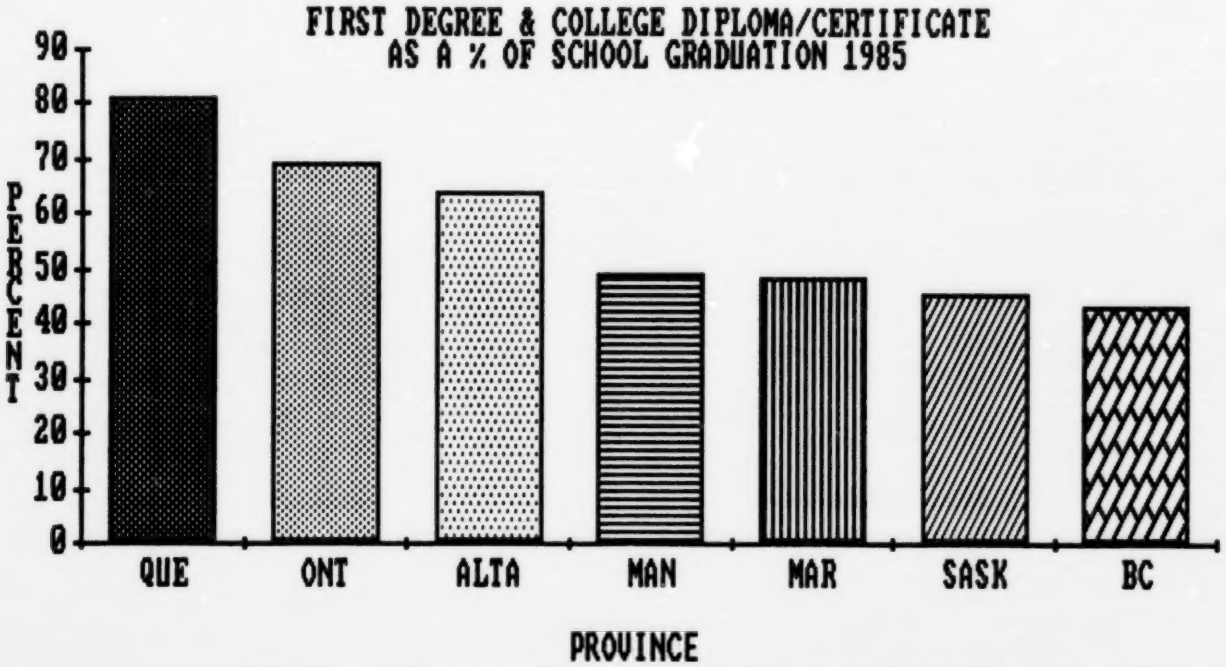
Questions:

(1) Why are so many university transfer students not transferring to a university?

(2) What would explain the large disparity in transfer rates between Selkirk and a number of other rural/urban colleges?

While British Columbia is in the middle of the pack among Canadian provinces for rate of transition from high school to post-secondary education, the provincial system appears to perform poorly for completion of a first degree or college diploma/certificate. The system appears to perform much better in terms of completion for both Career/Technical and Vocational programs, where completion rates average over 60% and over 80% respectively. Figure V shows some provincial comparisons.

FIGURE V



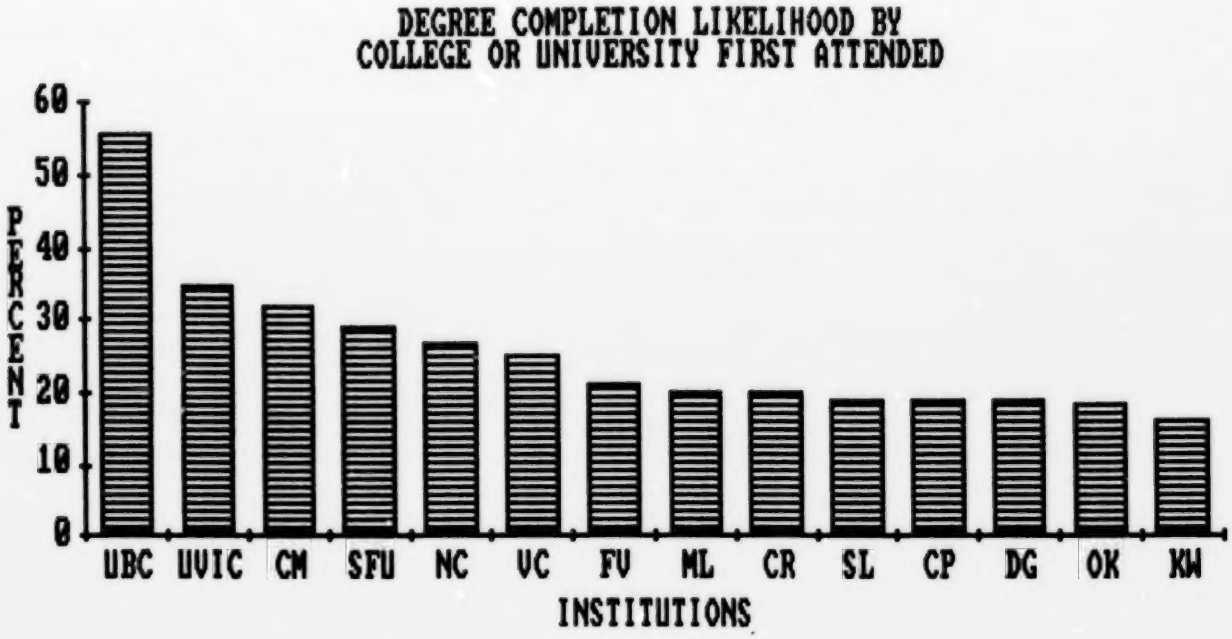
Degree completion in Quebec is actually lower than in Ontario and some other provinces; however, college completion is significantly higher in part due to compulsory CEGP attendance for pre-university studies.

Question:

(1) What, if anything, should we be doing to improve the degree/diploma completion rate in British Columbia?

The likelihood that a student entering an academic program will complete a degree is related to the institution first attended, as shown in Figure VI.

FIGURE VI



Questions:

(1) The likelihood of completing a degree in British Columbia is by far the highest at U.B.C. Does this relate to admission standards, pass standards from year to year, or to some other factor or factors?

(2) Would a two-year associate degree, available at both colleges and universities, assist significantly in raising the retention rates?

(3) Why do students attending some metro colleges (e.g. Douglas, Kwantlen) have a lower degree completion rate than some non-metro colleges (e.g. New Caledonia).

IV. TRANSITION TO WORK

The following graph depicts the relationships between level of education and the unemployment rate for two age groups, 15-24 years and 25 years and over.

FIGURE VII

The sharpest drop in unemployment rate occurs between high school and some post-secondary.

Questions:

(1) Do we need more incentives to encourage students to begin post-secondary education?

(2) Do we need more incentives to encourage students to complete post-secondary certificates, diplomas or degrees?

(3) What might some of these incentives be?

V. SOME BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Barriers to post-secondary participation may be of various kinds:

- academic (e.g. students don't have the pre-requisite skills or knowledge)
- financial (e.g. students cannot afford the fees, transportation and living costs)
- geographic (e.g. learning centres are inaccessible except by boarding away from home)
- psychological (e.g. some students may have a deep fear of going into long-term debt by taking out student loans)
- cultural (e.g. the value of post-secondary education may be underrated by students from low socio-economic backgrounds)

Questions:

(1) Does Adult Basic Education upgrading adequately provide for students who are unsuccessful in meeting entrance requirements?

(2) Although the student financial assistance program has been substantially improved, are there still significant financial barriers affecting those who want and can benefit from post-secondary education?

(3) What more can be done to overcome geographic barriers?

(4) Would improved counselling and information programs reduce various psychological and cultural barriers?

VI. CONCLUSION

The foregoing sections have very sketchily presented some information and raised some questions and issues. Much more extensive related information is available in a series of twelve Access Papers compiled by Ministry staff. Readers whose appetites have been whetted by this brief overview should go on to the Summary Paper 12 of the Access Papers, available by writing to:

Dawn McKay
Coordinator, Access Study
Ministry of Advanced Education and Job Training
818 Broughton Street, Victoria, B.C.
V8V 1X4

The full set of 12 papers is available at regional colleges for those whose interest in British Columbia's post-secondary education system is matched by a capacity for absorbing masses of intriguing and pertinent information, and who are not daunted by becoming progressively aware of the complexity of the issues surrounding the further development of our post-secondary educational heritage. It is intended that the full set of papers will be available to the Chairperson of each regional access committee, who may then distribute copies of individual papers, as needed, during discussions over the next six months. Readers of all these papers are urged to read them critically and not to be shy of questioning any stated or unstated assumptions which may be within the material.